

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 447

September 20, 1995, 12:05 p.m.
Page S-13912 Temp. Record

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS/Competition for Special Research Grants

SUBJECT: Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1996 . . . H.R. 1976. Cochran motion to table the Feingold/McCain amendment No. 2697.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO, 64-34

SYNOPSIS: As reported, H.R. 1976, the Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1996, will provide \$63.78 billion in new budget authority, 80 percent of which will be for mandatory spending programs, and 63 percent of which will be for food welfare programs.

The Feingold/McCain amendment would require a competitive process and a scientific peer review for the award of any funds under the Special Research Grant Program of the Department of Agriculture. Any funds made available for this program that were not expended would be returned to the Treasury for deficit reduction.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Cochran moved to table the amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

This bill will provide \$707 million for basic and applied agricultural research at Federal laboratories. It will also provide \$99.5 million for research that will be awarded through competitive grants through the National Research Initiative. Finally, it will provide \$40.7 million through special grants. The earmarks that our colleagues have become so exercised over are included in that third category. Though a few Senators may believe that all earmarks by definition are objectionable, we think most Senators agree that in some circumstances they are meritorious. We hope to convince these Senators that this circumstance is a case in point.

Senators were elected to serve national interests, but they were also elected to ensure that their States' individual interests were protected. Providing \$707 million for Federal research is certainly in the national interest. Federal scientists will work on agricultural projects that they believe are of the highest priority. Providing \$100 million for competitive grants is a step away from Federal

(See other side)

YEAS (64)			NAYS (34)		NOT VOTING (2)	
Republicans (40 or 75%)	Democrats (24 or 53%)		Republicans (13 or 25%)	Democrats (21 or 47%)	Republicans (1)	Democrats (1)
Bennett	Helms	Akaka	Abraham	Bingaman	Hatfield- ^{3AY}	Pryor- ⁴
Bond	Hutchison	Baucus	Ashcroft	Boxer		
Burns	Inhofe	Biden	Brown	Bradley		
Campbell	Jeffords	Breaux	Chafee	Bryan		
Coats	Kempthorne	Bumpers	Grams	Dodd		
Cochran	Lott	Byrd	Kassebaum	Feingold		
Cohen	Mack	Conrad	Kyl	Feinstein		
Coverdell	McConnell	Daschle	Lugar	Glenn		
Craig	Murkowski	Dorgan	McCain	Graham		
D'Amato	Nickles	Exon	Roth	Kennedy		
DeWine	Packwood	Ford	Santorum	Kerry		
Dole	Pressler	Harkin	Smith	Kohl		
Domenici	Shelby	Heflin	Warner	Lieberman		
Faircloth	Simpson	Hollings		Moynihan		
Frist	Snowe	Inouye		Murray		
Gorton	Specter	Johnston		Nunn		
Gramm	Stevens	Kerrey		Pell		
Grassley	Thomas	Lautenberg		Robb		
Gregg	Thompson	Leahy		Rockefeller		
Hatch	Thurmond	Levin		Simon		
		Mikulski		Wellstone		
		Moseley-Braun				
		Reid				
		Sarbanes				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

control, in that the research is not conducted by the Federal Government itself. State and independent research organizations compete for those grants. However, the interest that is served is still the national interest, and the national interest is still determined in roughly the same manner as it is determined by the Federal Government--projects are selected based on merit.

Special project grants are different. Those grants address local and regional needs. For example, if a State had a crop that played a critical part in its economy, and if that crop were threatened by a new pest, a special project grant could be earmarked to combat that new pest. If special project grants were not available, though, that State would have to hope that the crop was significant enough to attract national attention. Otherwise, "experts" in the Federal Government and in the panels distributing funds under the National Research Initiative might not bother doing any research to help out.

In all candor, Federal reliance on self-appointed "experts" has been a problem for certain States. States in the Northeast and to an extent the Midwest have been well represented by these "experts," but other States have not done as well. These experts, who seem to have particular difficulty in finding merit in doing research on agricultural problems in the South, have never been elected by anybody. We have been elected. Those Americans who voted for us did not vote for us to hand their representation over to "experts" who have consistently failed to represent their interests.

The Feingold/McCain amendment would have us turn over the one small part of agricultural research spending that is designed to protect States' rights. We realize that some Senators believe that this spending is pork-barrel spending because it is given by earmarks, but for the reasons given above we disagree. Earmarks in this case are appropriate. We therefore urge our colleagues to join us in tabling this amendment.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

The Special Research Grant Program provides grants to State agricultural experiment stations, institutions, and land grant colleges to carry out applied agricultural research. We have no objection to providing such grants; they have been helpful in keeping America's farmers the most productive farmers in the world. However, we do object to earmarking projects. The committee report accompanying this bill earmarks more than 90 grants. Such earmarks are common, and, though they are not binding, the Agriculture Department follows them to the letter. Last year, for example, there were 121 earmarked projects, 120 of which were funded (the other was not funded only because Congress rescinded funding for it). Not one of those projects had to compete for funding based on merit. Congress, which does not possess the highly technical, expert knowledge needed to identify meritorious projects, simply ordered that the money be given.

We find this to be a highly questionable way to spend money. Congress may by random luck pick the most meritorious projects, but it certainly will never pick them based upon its expert abilities. For our colleagues who believe otherwise, we ask them why certain of the projects are earmarked in this committee report. For example, we would like to know why we are being asked to insist on funding for research on soybean cyst nematodes and on jointed goatgrass. Perhaps more importantly, we would like to know why those earmarks specify exactly where that research is to take place. The truth is that each of the 90-plus projects identified in the committee report have the strong appearance of being pork-barrel projects selected more for where they are than for what they are worth.

We do not support this type of earmarks. The Feingold/McCain amendment would eliminate them from the bill. We therefore oppose the motion to table the amendment.